

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-02 DHA-02 ORM-02 IO-13 CIAE-00
DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /073 W
-----021137Z 019623 /15

P R 020845Z FEB 77

FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9396

INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

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CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SREF, RH, BC

SUBJECT: RHODESIAN STUDENTS CROSS INTO BOTSWANA

1. IN COURSE OF DISCUSSION ON RHODESIA WITH VICE PRESIDENT MASIRE FEB. 1 (REPORTED SEPTTEL), I INQUIRED ABOUT REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL RADIO BROADCAST FROM SALISBURY THAT A LARGE NUMBER OF STUDENTS HAD COME EN MASSE FROM RHODESIA TO BOTSWANA. MASIRE AND LEGWAILA (WHO WAS PRESENT) SAID 476 STUDENTS WERE INVOLVED. SOME 384 OF THE GROUP HAD COME ACROSS THE BORDER AT A VILLAGE NORTH OF BOBONONG; THE REMAINDER HAD ENTERED BOTSWANA SEVERAL MILES FURTHER NORTH AND WERE STAYING AT A DIFFERENT VILLAGE. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTIONS ABOUT MOTIVATIONS, MEANS OF TRAVEL, AGES, ETC., VP SAIRE SAID GOB HAS NO DETAILS. TO GET SUCH INFORMATION, CHARLES TIBONE, ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY AT THE PRESIDENCY, AND ANOTHER GOB OFFICIAL CONCERNED WITH REFUGEES WERE SENT URGENTLY TO THE AREA. INITIAL ATTEMPTS TO REACH THE VILLAGE WHERE THE STUDENTS ARE STAYING HAD BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL BECAUSE OF HIGH WATERS FOLLOWING RECENT RAINS. TIBONE AND HIS COLLEAGUE WERE THEREFORE SENT IN BY AIRCRAFT.

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2. MASIRE NOTED SMITH REGIME ANNOUNCEMENT THAT CHILDREN HAD BEEN "ABDUCTED". IN ADDITION, SUBSEQUENT UNVERIFIED REPORT FROM REUTERS STATES CHILDREN WERE TAKEN AT GUNPOINT FROM A MISSION SCHOOL JAN. 31 TOGETHER WITH THREE TEACHERS, A PASTOR AND TWO NURSES. PASTOR AND FOUR CHILDREN WERE REPORTED TO HAVE ESCAPED BACK INTO RHODESIA.

3. FROM PAST EXPERIENCE, MASIRE SAID GOB HAS REASON TO DOUBT RHODESIAN VERSION OF EVENTS. MASIRE SUGGESTED THAT REASON FOR STUDENTS LEAVING WAS THAT "THINGS ARE HEATING UP" IN RHODESIA WITH STRICTER ENFORCEMENT OF MILITARY RECRUITMENT, ARBITRARY ACCUSATIONS OF TERRORISM BY YOUTH, ETC., WHICH HE BELIEVED WAS MORE LIKELY EXPLANATION. MASIRE SAID GOB HAD ISSUED STATEMENT FEB. 1 REACTING TO SALISBURY-DATED STORY. TEXT FORWARDED SEPTEL.

4. ON EVENING OF FEB. 1 CABINET SECRETARY STEENKAMP TOLD ME HE HAD JUST TALKED BY PHONE WITH TIBONE, WHO HAD ARRIVED IN BOBONONG AND MET WITH STUDENTS. TIBONE REPORTED STUDENTS AGES THIRTEEN TO EIGHTEEN HAD DECIDED "AS A GROUP" TO LEAVE RHODESIA AND HAD WALKED 25 MILES ACROSS THE BORDER. THE PRINCIPAL REASON FOR LEAVING WAS "CONSTANT HARASSMENT" BY RHODESIAN MILITARY. STEENKAMP HASTILY ADDED THAT A MASS MOVEMENT OF THIS KIND "DOES NOT HAPPEN WITHOUT SOME LEADERSHIP" AND VOLUNTEERED SUGGESTION THAT A CERTAIN "MASS PSYCHOLOGY" HAD BEEN AT WORK AS WELL AS PEER PRESSURE. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE WAS ADAMANT ON THE POINT THAT THE STUDENTS HAD VOLUNTARILY WALKED THE 25 MILES BECAUSE NO ONE COULD HAVE FORCED THAT MANY TO DO SO. AS EVIDENCE OF GOB CONFIDENCE ON THIS POINT, STEENKAMP SAID GOB HAS INVITED FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS TO MEET FREELY WITH THE STUDENTS, ADDING THAT SEVERAL HAVE ALREADY ACCEPTED (E.G. THE RAND DAILY MAIL). HE ALSO RIDICULED THE SUGGESTION THAT THE GOB "WAS RECRUITING" REFUGEES WHEN EVERYONE KNEW THE GOB RESOURCES ARE STRAINED IN TAKING CARE OF THOSE WHO ARE ALREADY HERE.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REFUGEES, KIDNAPPING, STUDENTS, ALLEGATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 02-Feb-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977GABORO00294
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770037-0004
Format: TEL
From: GABORONE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770282/aaaacumf.tel
Line Count: 97
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 2b736dcd-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3434151
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: RHODESIAN STUDENTS CROSS INTO BOTSWANA
TAGS: SREF, RH, BC
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/2b736dcd-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009